

MAYOR SHEILA DIXON'S 2007 INAUGURAL ADDRESS

January 18, 2007

Thank you.

To everything there is a season and a time under heaven.

As Baltimore enters our new season, I am humbled by the faith you have placed in me.

I do not take lightly the oath I have sworn to uphold this afternoon.

But know that I will face each coming day of this new season in our city with prayer, with optimism, and with hope.

The kind of hope that has seen this daughter of Baltimore, come from humble beginnings to accept the honor of being the first woman to serve as the Mayor of the greatest city in the world!

God is truly good.

It's a tremendous honor to take this oath in the company of so many extraordinary Baltimoreans.

I want to thank every one of you for being here today to show your support for this city - and for my new Administration.

To my family and my friends - Thank you for always being there.

Thank you for accepting the sacrifices and for believing in my dream of public service.

This day is of even greater significance because of your presence.

I only wish my parents and brother were here to share this moment with us. I miss them very much.

Governor O'Malley - I thank you for your dedicated service to our city.

I thank you for being a friend and I thank you for being a Partner in Progress.

Your vision for a vibrant and rejuvenated Baltimore has resonated with our citizens.

Governor of the State of Maryland, I, and the people of Baltimore want you to know that we are proud of you and stand with you today and in the future.

I know that you will continue to be a champion of our city.

To former Mayor D'Alesandro, thank you for being here today. I also want to acknowledge Governor Schaefer and Mayor Schmoke - who could not be here with us this afternoon, but both have offered invaluable advice and counsel over my years in public service.

I also want to acknowledge the members of the Maryland General Assembly and the many elected officials present.

And I also want to extend a heartfelt welcome to my former colleagues on the City Council. It was my honor to serve with all of you.

As I ascend to the position of Mayor, it appears that Councilwoman Stephanie Rawlings-Blake is preparing herself to follow closely in my footsteps as City Council President.

How appropriate that the daughter of the man who encouraged me to run for office, the great Howard "Pete" Rawlings, will be succeeding me as president of the council.

When Baltimore was founded in 1792, there was no guarantee that this small town would survive. It faced enormous divisions: Divisions of religion, divisions of race, and divisions of class.

Immigrants from across the globe, slaves and former slaves - all came to build a city - to create a place to call home.

Those who came before us created a city where freedom was honored, tolerance was fostered, creativity was encouraged and diversity celebrated.

They made a city where dreams really could come true - regardless of your race, your religion, your place of birth or your gender.

Through the generations Baltimoreans built a better world than the ones they left behind.

And now - it's our turn.

It's our turn to renew the promise of this great city - and to leave it better than we found it.

From the row houses of West Baltimore to the mansions of Guilford.

From the high rises of Canton to the cottages of Waverly.

From the uniqueness that is Hampden to the docks of Fells Point.

From Morrell Park to Ashburton to Dundalk to Sandtown-Winchester to Mt. Washington.

It is now time for us to come together - One People - One Baltimore.

Many of you may think you know who Sheila Dixon is.

However, after nearly 20 years of public service, with some successes and some failures, I want you to know that I am much more than a newspaper headline or a sound bite on the evening news.

I am a former teacher.

I am former international trade specialist.

I am a proud parent.

I am a working mother.

I am an advocate for families and neighborhoods.

I am a dedicated public servant.

I will be a mayor who solves problems.

A mayor you can believe in.

A mayor you can be proud of.

I want to bring citizens from across the city together to start a process of change that will help us unite around proven ideas.

It will not always be easy to find consensus.

It's easier to be against something.

It's easy to blame.

It's easy to stop.

The easiest thing in the world is to decide we are right and *they* are wrong.

What's hard is to listen.

What's hard is to admit that we need to come together.

We must come together.

We need to leave behind old ideas and long-held grudges.

Today, that's exactly what I am asking you to do.

To keep our economy moving in Baltimore - we'll need to work with those who can create high wage jobs. And we need new investments in our infrastructure - and the revenue to pay for it.

As mayor, I will balance the interests of growth and development with environmental and cultural concerns.

There is room for everyone at the table and all are invited to be part of a conversation about this city's future.

We have thousands of our fellow Baltimoreans out of work - and far too many of them are running out of hope.

Meanwhile there are those who would seek to pit business leaders against the community, to pit planned growth and managed development against Baltimore's rich history, its green spaces and a diverse culture.

We have factions of the business community blaming the government, and factions of the government blaming the business community.

Do we want to find someone to blame - or do we want to find solutions?

I say it's time to start working together to find common purpose and common ground.

I believe that a clean city is a thriving city. I ask you today to join with me in a renewed effort to impress upon visitors and residents alike - we will not tolerate the continued trashing of our city, literally and figuratively.

We want clean streets, clean allies, clean parks and clean play grounds. A great city like Baltimore deserves no less.

We do not always need to re-create the wheel.

Government does not have all the answers.

This administration will go into every neighborhood in Baltimore; into every community.

And we will listen to you.

The answers that we are seeking to the problems that have plagued us are in the hearts and the minds of our citizens.

We need you - I need you - to be a part of making Baltimore a safer and a cleaner city.

I am asking that today we put aside simplistic rhetoric and start working towards real solutions.

I don't think for one second this is going to be easy.

I think we've grown accustomed to explaining away problems instead of solving them.

But I don't think any of us want Baltimore to be known as the city that knows how to make excuses.

I want to leave behind a city - for generations to come - that isn't afraid to solve even the toughest problems.

The tough problems like homelessness.

Last month, a coalition of government, the private sector, the civic and foundation community and the activist community came together to pledge to end homelessness in this city by 2010.

Together, we will ensure that every man, woman and child who is homeless, not only has a place to lay their head, but will get every opportunity to turn their lives around and become a contributing member of our city.

We all have a role to play in making this more than a dream, but a reality.

I don't pretend to have all the answers. But I don't accept that there are no solutions.

I will work today, tomorrow and every day to forge common purpose to address the issues that have challenged us for far too long.

This job is going to be one of the biggest challenges of my life. But I'm ready.

I'm ready to make Baltimore Safer, Greener and Cleaner.

To carry on the progress of the recent past.

To preserve the spirit of the city's history.

To execute the comprehensive master plan.

To build on academic achievements in our schools.

And to operate all city agencies effectively and efficiently.

I pledge to work with every activist, every interest group and any individual who can present an idea that works.

I believe that if we can solve the problems of balancing growth and moderation, ensure all people have a home or shelter and make having clean streets a point of pride in every Baltimore neighborhood - then we, my friends, can solve any problem!

The way to become a city that works - is to start working together.

I pledge to work every day for you to solve problems - big and small.

I won't give up until our streets are clean and green.

I will tackle the smallest pothole - and find a way to create solid affordable house.

And we need to make sure developers address the housing needs of working Baltimoreans - which is why I support new requirements to build workforce housing for teachers, nurses, firefighters, sanitation workers and the other hard working people of our city.

We'll know that we are making progress when we have found common ground in the fight to improve our schools.

I think this city is ready to put aside political battles and present a united front to protect our children.

Yes - we do have legitimate disagreements.

But what is more important - winning a political battle or making progress for our children?

With so many places to find common ground - I say it is time to work together for our children rather than against each other for the sake of politics.

Do we want to make a point? Or do we want to make a difference? I, for one, say it's time to make a difference.

And to make a difference - we need to make better use of all the resources at our disposal.

I pledge today to ensure that we live within our means, to watch your dollars and to ensure they are spent wisely, and to do everything we can to ease your tax burden.

Everyday families and individuals in Baltimore make the tough financial decisions of running their households. You should expect no less from your government.

In the Dixon administration, we're not going to find excuses - we're going to find solutions. And we're going to find the very best and brightest people in this city and this nation to help us implement those plans.

We're going to make sure city government serves every resident without regard to whom they are or who they know.

I want to say this loudly and clearly - if you work for the city of Baltimore - you work for everyone. Not the lobbyists, or the rich and powerful, but everyone.

Our generation of Baltimoreans has inherited a great legacy, and great challenges.

I think that if we work together - there will be no challenge too great to overcome.

Homelessness, affordable housing, high wage jobs, safe and stable neighborhoods, clean streets, promoting arts and culture, excellent schools, excellent parks and playgrounds, a clean environment and a cleaner city government.

We know the challenges. What we have yet to demonstrate as a generation of leaders is the ability to put aside party, and partisanship, and petty differences to find common purpose.

I have the privilege of serving this city as mayor when she is at one of the strongest and most vibrant positions we've seen in generations. But we did not come to this place by chance.

My mother and countless generations before her set a standard - and an example. Generations of Baltimoreans came together - and gave us the world's greatest city.

In a world filled with so much uncertainty. Terrorism, civil strife, cultural wars and growing intolerance - all of which have the potential to shake our nation and our city at its core.

One thing remains certain. With shared values, with faith and with unconditional love and respect - we can overcome anything - together.

So now, Baltimore, it's our turn.

Our turn to show that we can continue to restore this city.

Our turn to show that we can extend freedom, tolerance and respect to every Baltimorean.

Our turn to show that we can put aside our differences.

If we can do that - then our generation will have done our part to preserve and enhance this special place we call Baltimore.

I think we're ready for the job.

I know I'm ready to get to work.

And I'm ready to work with everyone.

In recognition of this historic moment, for both the City of Baltimore and me, I'd like to close with these words from the famous educator and founder of the National Council of Negro Women, Mary McLeod Bethune.

"Faith is the first factor in a life devoted to service. Without it, nothing is possible. With it, nothing is impossible."

Thank you all for being here.

And may God continue to bless the great city of Baltimore.